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ABSTRACT

This booklet describes the two main kinds of day care services, private homes and day care c nters, tells how and where to find out about them. It offers some general advice on what to look for in selecting a day care facility and gives some practical information about what to do if there are no adequate day care facilities available in a community. (Author/CS)

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DAY CARE FOR YOUR CHILDREN

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FOREWORD

If you are a working mother or a father raising children alone, most likely one of the things you are concerned about is the care of your children during your working hours. Since more and more mothers are going to work—either of necessity or choice—the need for adequate day care for children has increased, and the variety of day care services offered can be a bit confusing.

This booklet offers some guidelines to help you select the right day care arrangements for your children and your particular situation. It presents the two main sources of day care services—private homes and day care centers; how and where to find out about them; some general advice on what to look for in selecting a day care facility; and some practical information about what to do if there are no adequate day care facilities available in your community.

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FAMILY DAY CARE HOMES

The most common arrangement for children under three years is with a day care mother (caregiver) who takes care of the children in her own home. Of course, older children, children with special needs, or children of various ages from the same family may also be cared for by such a caregiver. Some people prefer to have their children taken care of in a day care home as opposed to a center. If you decide on this type of arrangement, you will want the best possible care for your child when you are not with him.

How and Where to Find Out About Them

A day care program directed by a social agency is a good place to begin looking for day care for your children. The agency supervises and inspects family day care homes and can advise you about a good one for your child. Check with the department of welfare or the community planning council to find out if your community has such services.

Also, try contacting a local church, ask your friends, rela-

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tives, or neighbors for a recommendation; place a short ad in the newspaper; or ask a local PTA for suggestions. Get two or three names and visit each home to find the one you think will be best for your child.

What to Look for in a Family Day Care Home

- The License—Most States require a license to care for other people's children in family day care homes. The license tells you that the home has been inspected, and meets health, safety and other conditions. If your State requires a license, ask to see it in the day care homes you visit, or call the agency that issues licenses, usually the department of social services. Find out if the license has ever been revoked, and if so, for what reason.
- The Home and its Furnishings—It's a good idea to select a home close to where you live, if you can find a good one. It will be less tiring on you and your child if you don't have to travel far every day.

The day care home should be about like your own, so that your child will feel at ease in it. It should be large enough to comfortably take care of the caregiver's family and the added children. Look it over carefully. Your child might be spending many hours in it. The rooms should be well lighted, safe, in good repair and, in most instances, above the basement level. In cold weather, the house should be well heated. Is there space in the house for the children to play quietly? Does each child have his own blanket or sheet which is not used by the caregiver's family?

Is there a place for each child to keep his own things? Are there separate towels, washcloths, and sheets for each child?

Are meals served in a clean dining area, with proper utensils for children? Is the kitchen clean?

Is there a toilet in good repair? A washbasin with hot and cold running water? Are there footstools to help little children reach them?

If there are stairs, do they have a handrail? Are upstairs windows kept locked, or are they securely screened or barred? Are heaters ventilated and screened?

Is there a place to keep a child who becomes sick in the day care home, where he will be away from the other children and be available for?

If there is a yard, is it fenced, with gates that cannot be

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let the children try out their own ideas, but still supervise their activities? Is she energetic enough to be able to keep up with the children? Be sure she has enough experience in caring for children. Are the children happy? Do they seem to like her? Do you feel your child or children would be happy with her? How many other adults will the child come in contact with in the home — grandmothers, uncles, aunts, etc.?

Cost and Services

When you find the home you think is right for your child, you and the day care mother should fully understand what each of you is to do. To avoid misunderstandings, it's helpful if you two write down what you agree on, and both of you keep a copy. Here are some suggestions for points to settle:

- How many days of care will you need for your child each week?
- What is the fee and what does it cover? Food? Diaper service? Laundry?
- Do you pay for absent days? Holidays? Vacations?
- Must you pay in advance?
- Does she give a dated receipt for each payment (may be a tax deduction)?
- Who delivers the child and picks him up? Unless you phone or send a note, the child should not be turned over to anyone but the person agreed upon.
- What will your child call the day care mother? It may confuse him if he calls her "granny," or "aunt," or if he calls both of you "mother."
- What about meals? Do the children get a well-balanced, hot meal in the middle of the day, and good snacks at mid-morning and mid-afternoon?

From time to time you may want to alter your lists. Always discuss any additions or changes with the day care mother so you will be able to work together for the good of your child.

You Two Must Work Together

In many ways you and the day care mother depend on each other. You use what she knows and she uses what you know to give the best care for your child. Discuss with her such things as what food he likes and doesn't like; foods that disagree with him; allergies; fears; naptime; any special way he has of eating, eating, using the toilet, toilet training, things he

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can do for himself and things he can't do yet; how he gets along with other children; if he is in school, where he is allowed to go on his own; may he bring friends to play at her house?

Be friendly and business-like in your dealings with the day care mother. If you are having problems in your personal life, go to a social agency or professional counselor. Don't seek advice from your child's caregiver. She is to care for your child, not solve your problems.

But do talk over any questions about your child's day with her. Get her to tell you what your child did during the day—interesting things that filled his day, not just that he was good.

Treat her as you want your employer to treat you. You have regular hours and pay on your job. The day care mother should have regular hours and pay.

If your child likes or even loves his day care mother, you should be glad, and not jealous. The fact that he loves her shows that he is happy, which is one of the big reasons you tried to find a good family day care home for him. Your child needs both of you—but for different reasons. Remember this, the caregiver can never take your place in his life.

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DAY CARE CENTERS

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Types and Where to Find Out About Them

You can probably locate a day care center through local, county or state public welfare agencies, the Community Coordinated Child Care Program, if there is one in your community, voluntary agencies such as United Way of America or Community Chest, churches, settlement houses, Head Start programs, etc.

What to Look for in a Day Care Center

In order to get a license, a day care center must earn it. The center itself is supposed plan of care for children and for operating a day care facility have usually been carefully investigated. The license can be suspended or revoked if a center is

found not to comply with the rules and regulations governing day care facilities and services.

Whether it is a private or public day care center, there should be a trained professional staff running it, and a well-rounded program which offers services to all children, including those with special needs. There should be no discrimination in regard to race, color, creed, sex, religion, national origin, or marital status or age of parents. The center must provide learning experiences which help children develop physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. It must have sufficient indoor and outdoor space and equipment for the number and ages of the children enrolled to suit the physical and other developmental needs of the children.

All the children enrolled in a day care center should have a physical examination by a doctor or any other child health service with continuing health services by the center if the family cannot provide it for the child.

Depending on the daily length of the program, a day care center usually provides meals for the children, which are prepared and served in a clean, safe setting. The staff and all volunteers must be free from health problems which would be harmful to the children in any way.

As you can see, a day care center is a pretty safe place for your child. Just the same, you should visit any center you are considering for your child. Talk to the staff and look over the center, keeping in mind many of the points discussed in the section on Family Day Care Homes.

OTHER DAY CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Sometimes a parent simply can't find day care service. What do you do after you have knocked on all the doors and none of them is open to you? You might consider a relative, friend or neighbor. But even then you have every right to be choosy and ask as many questions as you would with a stranger. Your relative or friend will respect and understand your concern for your children, and if she is really able to care for your children, she will be proud to answer your questions and cooperate with you.

If you decide to bring someone into your own home to care for your children, make sure that person has all the qualifications you would require of persons giving out-of-home care.

Again, you should settle on what her obligations will be as far as your child is concerned. She should not have to clean your house, but she should be willing to do the child's laundry and to wash dishes that he and she may have used during the day. There are usually several agencies listed in the telephone directory and their requirements for caregivers are fairly high. Just the same, you should interview several people from the agencies before you select one.

It may be possible to pool or rotate your child care among parents. This is generally known as a "cooperative day care program" and requires each mother to offer her services in the day care facility for certain days or, in some instances, paying fees so that qualified staff may be hired. Talk to other parents who have the same difficulty finding day care arrangements for their children. Take the initiative if necessary, and post notices about your interest in starting a day care co-op in places like your local supermarket, church bulletins, or neighborhood drug store. If you have a community newspaper, put a notice in that. It is usually quite inexpensive.

There are no set rules for working out the arrangements with other parents. It takes the willingness and cooperation on everyone's part to provide good day care service.

You can, however, purchase a manual regarding the establishment of a parent cooperative program from the California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools, Inc., 682 East 67th Street, Long Beach, California 90805, entitled, POINTERS FOR PARTICIPATING PARENTS. The price is $5.50 including postage and handling.

If day care arrangements or facilities are inadequate, it may also be possible for you to work with other parents to get new programs established, such as through the Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) Program, College and University-based Parent Child centers, or the creation of an industrially-sponsored day care center. A good source of information regarding industrial-based day care is a booklet entitled DAY CARE SERVICES-INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT, published by The Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, Washington, D.C.

It's possible for a small group of determined parents to change and improve the quality and quantity of day care services in a community, if they work together and talk to enough people who are in a position to help.

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in touch with in an emergency.

If your child has special needs the day care mother or center staff needs to know about them. Explain the special needs, problems, handicaps and write down any instructions they will need.

Plan Ahead for Sickness

Your child should have a good physical examination before he enters any day care program in a home or in a center. But sometime during your child's day care experience, he is apt to get a bad cold or become sick in another way. In some instances children may be better off going along with their regular routine if they are *not* seriously ill.

However, if your child is sick enough so that he cannot function, he should not go to the day care facility. If he becomes seriously ill while at the center, you should be contacted at once. A seriously ill child needs his mother and you should plan to take care of him yourself while he is the sickest.

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If your child has such symptoms as a high fever, severe diarrhea, or much vomiting, you should certainly keep him at home until he is well.

Is Your Child Happy?

After several weeks, the way your child acts about the day care arrangements will tell you if he is getting along all right and if all is well. Some good signs that he is getting along fine are: That he talks about his day there. That at home he eats well and sleeps well. That he is active and cheerful. But if he cries at being left there each day, and begins to get upset easily at home, to lose interest in eating, to be listless, to sleep poorly, you had better look more deeply into his day.

Talk to the caregiver. Try to find out how he behaves after you leave him. Most likely, she will be more than willing to help you and your child. You may want to take your child to his doctor and talk with him about the problem. Or go to the department of welfare or the department of health and ask if there is someone you can talk with who may be able to help you.

It may just be your child is not ready or had not been properly prepared to be away from you. But if the child continues to be unhappy, you may have made a mistake in picking the day care home or center you did, and you may have to make another plan. Tell your child's caregiver the reason you are doing this. She will probably want what is best for the child, as you do.

If You Have to Change Day Care Arrangements

To change a child from one day care facility to another and then another can be very upsetting for him. Unless you are sure that you have made a serious mistake in picking the day care facility, do not move him to another without giving a great deal of thought to it. But if for some reason you take him from the day care facility, plan with his caregiver for that step just as you did when he first came. Let your child know about it as early as you can and tell him what the change will be.

If your child has been in a family day care home, try to take him back for a visit or two after he has left. To be taken away one evening and never to get back or see the caregiver again may bother him, and he may even think it's his fault.

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YOU WILL HAVE PEACE OF MIND

When you have found a good day care arrangement for your child, you won't be worrying about his being alright while he is away from you. Your child will have a better chance of becoming a happy, well-rounded, and healthy adult, and you will have peace of mind, knowing that he is well cared for and in safe hands.